

# **Festival Place or Place of Festival? The role of place identity and attachment in the festival environment.**

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This paper addresses place identity and attachment theory in the context of events. Viewing place as a symbolic part of the consumption process, a "Model of Festival Place" is developed. This advances theories that presuppose environment as nothing more than a context for consumption. Selecting the festival as a suitable event context, literature suggests that place identity and place attachment do affect consumer perceptions however, confusion exists regarding exactly how they impact the event experience. This confusion is addressed using an interpretive methodology which aims to understand the lived experience of festival-goers. Unstructured interviews are analysed using thematic analysis to demonstrate that identity and attachment do influence consumer perceptions of the festival environment however, not as first imagined. Environments become either creations of the festival or exist independently of them. The latter allows realistic place-based identities to form, resulting in experiential consonance (i.e. between festival expectations and reality). The former creates more abstract identities resulting in unrealistic expectations and as a result, immediate attachment to specific festival locations is much weaker. Continuity-based recommendations valid across numerous experiential contexts are offered, providing clearer theoretical understanding of the experiential place as well as practical suggestions to improve the consumer's experience.

## **Introduction**

Festival events are becoming increasingly important for tourism development. Not only do they provide strong economic benefits to often peripheral communities, they also provide a platform to celebrate cultural heritage and identity (Ferdinand and Williams, 2013). For the consumer they provide experiences which elicit fantasies, feelings and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1983). Although distinct in genre (see appendix 1) the most influential and popular within the UK tourism market is the music festival

In 2011 135,000 individuals attended the Glastonbury Festival (of Contemporary Performing Arts) generating approximately £100 million for the local economy (UK Music, 2011). Albeit the largest, Glastonbury represents just one of over 700 music festivals held annually in the UK. Collectively these festivals attract 3.4 million visitors contributing revenues of £546 million. This figure represents nearly one third of the total value of the European Festival market estimated at £1.5 billion in 2011 (Intel, 2012). In isolation these figures make for positive reading, however contextually speaking, the festival industry finds itself in a particularly challenging period. Various negative pressures including European competition, increasing artists' fees, declining sponsorship, increasing production costs, and changing legislation are pulling the UK festival market towards a state of stagnancy (VirtualFestivals, 2010). With industry-generated solutions proving inadequate, an academic understanding of alternate resolutions becomes more of a necessity now than in previous years.

This paper aims to address a number of these issues by focussing on the more tangible aspects of the experience with place and location central themes of the research. Often

overlooked, an understanding of place-based considerations provides very strong theoretical and practical foundations; foundations from which academics and organisers can better broach social and personal dilemmas present in the festival experience.

### **The Festival as a Tourist Destination**

Evolving from more literal meanings, the modern festival has become '*a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview*' (Falassi, 1987, p.2). With this, each festival becomes a unique experience bound only by framing rituals at the open and close of the event. These rituals allow modification of time and space in order to present a new vision which accentuates the temporary physical festival environment (Richards and Wilson, 2006). Developing as a contextually relevant factor, the environment becomes a source of consumption in its own right (Durkheim, 1968). These places and environments can then be studied for their own sake rather than examples of more general consumption processes (Glennie and Thrift, 1996). Adopting this view, studies reveal the ability of places to create location, history, heritage, and reputation (Skinner, 2011; Ren and Blichfeldt, 2011) which also assists in developing brand, authenticity, commitment, and sustainability (Aitken and Campelo, 2011). As well as entertainment then, festivals must also focus on the perpetuation of local traditions, the regeneration of areas (both economically and culturally), the promotion of creativity (Wilks, 2009), and interaction and involvement across the festival tourism industry (Smith and Richards, 2013).

Acknowledging the potential benefits of staging an event, it is necessary to further develop the festival as a destination by examining both the inputs and outputs involved in creating the festival place. This multi-layered approach emphasises place as a social construct (Johnstone, 2012) emerging from an interaction between an individual and the environment and while there will be some mutually shared elements (e.g physical and functional properties), place is a fundamentally unique concept shaped by individual beliefs (Murphy *et al.*, 2007). With this, relationships with place become two way; individuals become responsible for creating and sustaining places which then become responsible for influencing thought processes (Urry, 1995). To best maintain this relationship, Jorgensen and Steadman (2001) identify four dimensions to consider: place identity (the beliefs about relationships between self and place), place dependence (the degree to which the place, in relation to other places, is perceived to underpin behaviour), place attachment (the emotional connection to a place), and place climate (the objective and subjective atmosphere nested in a place). Of these, dependence and climate are found to be less related in the initial construction of place (Hernandez *et al.*, 2007) and as such place attachment and place identity will be explored first.

### **Attachment and Identity**

Place attachment refers to the affective and emotional relationships that individuals form with specific places (Kyle *et al.*, 2005). These result in interactive processes that endow physical places with emotional meanings and personal experiences (Johnstone, 2012). Attachment usually manifests itself as a strong tendency to maintain close bonds to specific, decommodified, singular places (Kleine and Menzel-Baker, 2004). These bonds form only after prolonged interaction and become stronger as more time is spent in that place (Elder *et al.*, 1996). Developing a strong attachment to a place can be very beneficial for development of both individuals and groups, primarily because it allows place identity to develop independently of other identity concepts. Place identity thus becomes a salient part of identity, that is, '*a sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of broadly*

*conceived cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives'* (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983, pg. 59). Harmonious attachment and identity provide the individual with a contextual sense of belonging, purpose, and meaning (Tuan, 1976). If sufficiently strong, behaviour can also be altered either as an inversion or an intensification of daily characteristics (Lee *et al.*, 2012). For example, a strong association between the image/brand of a place and a consumer's own personality will result in a higher level of attachment (Aitken and Campelo, 2011) increasing intention to travel to the place again (Murphy *et al.*, 2007). Similarly Brennan-Horley *et al.* (2007) suggest grafting an image onto a place through the development of an experience (e.g. a festival) is an efficient and effective means to manage attachment and identity. However, despite these theoretical suggestions, it is also acknowledged that due to the infancy of the concept (Skinner, 2008) extant research has so far failed to fully operationalise place-based theories across contexts and disciplines (Hauge, 2007).

### **Methodology**

Adopting an interpretivist approach, this research aims to understand placial experiences from the perspective of the music festival attendee. Medway *et al.* (2011) suggest an exploratory qualitative approach is most appropriate for such '*neglected disciplines*'. To achieve this, semi-structured interviews are conducted during music festivals. Events are selected based on location, entertainment genre, size, and duration. This framework provides three largely homogenous festivals (i.e. audience they attract and entertainment they provide) that differ significantly in terms of the physical space in which they operate. Attending each festival, the researcher uses prior knowledge combined with observed behaviours to adopt an intentionally purposive sampling method. Although not implementing any formal quota, a selection of ages, gender, festival experience, and genre of fan are sought. Interviewees are added until theoretical saturation is achieved. In total 51 individuals are selected to take part in the study (17 from each festival) (see appendix 2) with interviews lasting between 20 minutes and 80 minutes. To allow individuals the freedom to explore their own subjective ideas regarding the festival place, guidance is kept to a minimum. All interviews are digitally recorded for verbatim transcription. Using NVivo, data is coded and condensed to show extant and emerging themes (see appendix 3). These themes are then used to explore the original research aim.

### **Findings and Discussion**

From the outset it is clear that the varied festival environments have a significant impact on festival attendees. This distinction is most noticeable between festival A (A) and festival C (C) with each appearing at opposite extremes of a placial spectrum; A takes place across a number of large anonymous fields whereas C takes place in the grounds of a country estate. The effect of this is immediately noticeable when discussing geographic territories. The closest A comes to securing an actual location is in national terms: "*it's the main festival to come to in Scotland*" (Graeme, A); "*I haven't been to Scotland before...it's nice to come up to a new country and find out what their festivals are like*" (Joseph, A); "*so it was more the fact that it was 'the' Scottish music festival*" (Paul, A); "*well obviously it's in Scotland...so yeah, it's your local festival*" (Grant, A). This romantic notion of Scotland as a singular place creates an association between A and Scotland which results in a strong, albeit broad identity.

On the contrary festival B (B) and C provide a more specific geographical location which is partially responsible for early festival associations. Often this is assisted by previous experiences of the area: "*I've been up this way before on holiday so we know it's a good area*" (Maureen, B); "*the thing that attracted us to it was the location first of all...it's in a*

valley and it's a really beautiful setting...Chris also has family who live locally so we were kind of familiar with the area so we knew where we were coming" (Julie-Ann, B); "it makes its name on the area...it's so nice and people don't realise until they come to something like this, and then everyone comes back cause they know how nice it is" (Michelle, B). A similar story is told at festival C: "for a lot of people here it's not just about the weekend. There's a lot of build up to the event which a lot of the local businesses are involved in" (Graham, C); "well I always felt it was a lot more like a community event than, say A...it's like it's your own local festival" (Michael, C); "the spotlight is definitely on the Highlands rather than Scotland" (Jeff, C). The way these festivals are perceived is not only reflected in identity, but also in the subsequent attachment individuals feel towards specific locations within the festival.

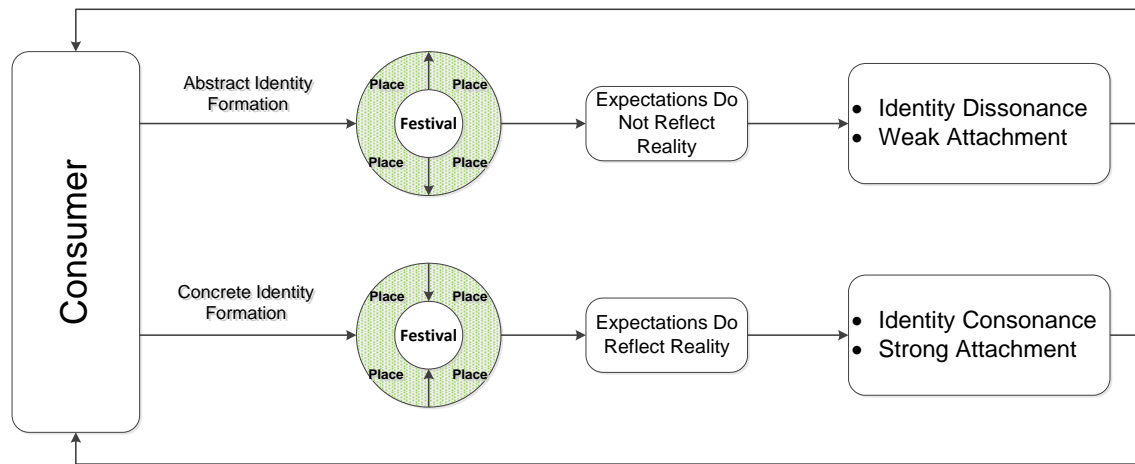
Unable to accurately associate the 'Scottish' festival with any distinct town, city, park, estate, etc., A does not fully become either specific or singular (Kleine and Menzel-Baker, 2004). Individuals therefore begin the festival experience with a more abstract idea of what to expect. Although past experience is useful (Elder *et al.*, 1996), even those who have visited previously are unable to identify with the festival location due to changes in the layout. This proves a source of irritation as Graeme notes; "they had changed it from the normal way you get into the campsite...there was no indication of where you were supposed to go and people were just joining the queue from all directions". Even when he gained access to the camping area, "there was a bit of discomfort about which fields were open and which weren't – it was all different to last year". These discontinuities are elaborated on by Grant when talking about his usual camping area; "well we have a tradition of camping in purple 4...but not any more as they always change the camping areas around; so where purple was last year is now pink; although we still always try to get a picture with the purple 4 sign". This idea of continuity and attachment is also experienced in a functional way. For example, despite appearing in a different location each year, Claire and her friends adopt the healthy area as a meeting point; "this has come to be our communal point – if we're lost or meeting at random points in the day. I like it up here too – it feels like my chill out bit". For Paul and his friends it is; "the sound tripod – we did it the first year, it's like an unwritten rule...meet there". So although created by the festival and occupying no significant physical location or explicit value, certain individuals imbue these locations with enough emotional investment that attachment begins to form. Weak at festival A, these processes are easier to identify at C.

Although bound more by its location - a large country estate, the organisers of C achieve a stronger level of attachment to place by incorporating the natural and man-made features of the estate (including ruins of old buildings, a walled garden area, an amphi-theatre-esque garden stage, and a grand hall) into festival proceedings. For example, Graham comments; "it's the ruins that really make it special...and you just look around...the hills and trees, even the little features like the old walls really add to the event". As well as being aesthetically pleasing, these features are also utilised from a functional perspective. Gary, who is attending with his young son, explains; "we were thinking if we sat here we wouldn't see the stage when it gets busy but you can...it's just a cracking arena, especially for families". Due to these immovable objects, continuity is ensured year on year, allowing individuals to not only identify with the festival location, but also build a very strong level of emotional attachment with specific places. Such continuity and clarity is also praised at B. Although far less restricted in terms of permanent features, by adopting a consistent layout, individuals recognise and appreciate this; "they've got a good formula and they've stuck with it, so they know where best to put everything to make sure it's laid out properly for them and for us" (Robert, B).

Across all three festivals, identity appears to exist prior to actual attendance, and contrary to the thoughts of Kyle *et al* (2005), independently of attachment. Whereas attachment cannot occur without personal experience, identity can be an abstract concept activated by various stimuli (e.g. when buying tickets, chatting with others, watching highlights etc.). However, due to the intangibility of identity it is not always a realistic reality. For example, those attending A have more abstract ideas of what to expect which does not always mirror the true place. In comparison, because C exists year round individuals are always able to maintain a constant degree of identity, forming a concrete representation of the festival place; at the event this perceived identity closely matches the identity that is experienced. Although attachment can occur without identity (Hernandez *et al*, 2007), a stronger identity allows the process to occur more quickly which is especially important during the temporal festival experience.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings demonstrate two distinct ways in which the festival place is created. These will be termed the ‘festival place’ and the ‘place of festival’ (see figure 1).



**Figure 1: Model of Festival Place (Source: Author)**

The ‘*festival place*’ occurs when a festival locates itself in a non-specific location with little geographic relevance; the staging of the festival is ultimately responsible for creating a notion of place. However by creating only a temporary space, a relatively weak outlet exists which restricts identity and attachment, resulting in a place identity linked more to the festival than any geographic place. Individuals tend then to use more abstract information sources (e.g. photos, videos, past experiences, stereotypical festivals, and word of mouth) when creating beliefs about the festival. Although intangible, these beliefs become the foundation for place identity and often cause dissonance between expectations and reality. This results in lengthier harmonisation periods before place-based relationships can form. Contrary to this, the ‘*place of festival*’ is used to describe a festival situated in an already established location. Existing independently of the festival means a degree of identification with the place may already exist. In these situations individuals gain a more concrete idea of likely festival experiences. Festival C, for example, highlights the permanent features that exist as well as how they are incorporated in the festival experience. This consonance between expectations and reality allows an accurate place-based identity to develop and with it, place attachment becomes stronger and more immediate. Application of these findings offers a number of practical implications to optimise the role of place in the overall festival experience.

Festival organisers (and other Public sector organisations) are quick to emphasise social and individual stimuli as key to repeat visits and place loyalty. Although not wrong, there is also a real need for the notion of attachment to place to be incorporated into the mix of marketing activities. For example, communications must be as accurate as possible with visuals used sparingly during the pre-festival build-up; managing attendee's place-based expectations assists in achieving a realistic identity from the outset. Consistency must also be encouraged to ensure constant and expected placial experiences; emphasising the 'place of festival' will lead to better defined events, more rapid attachment, and a degree of loyalty to the place. Not only does this assist during the festival, it is vital for potentially securing increased return visits independently of the festival experience.

With numerous threats to the industry, the power of place and the associated marketing benefits must be recognised and exploited. New technologies allow for more interactive and realistic pre-festival experiences. It is up to organisers to combine traditional media, strategic alliances with local Government and Public Sector organisations, and brand ambassadors with new interactive technologies to capture the hearts, minds and discretionary spend of both the new and old generation of festival attendee.

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## Appendix 1: Festival Typology

<b>Festival Theme</b>	<b>Festival</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<b>Religious</b>	Buddhist Festival (China)	(Ryan and Gu, 2010)
	Oshun Festival (Africa)	(Idowu, 1992)
<b>Spiritual</b>	Mazu Pilgrimage (Taiwan)	(Shuo <i>et al.</i> , 2009)
	Burning Man Festival (USA)	(Sherry and Kozinets, 2011)
<b>Comedy</b>	Comedy Festival Attendance	(Frew, 2006)
	Edinburgh Festival Fringe	(Friedman, 2011)
<b>Cultural</b>	Global Village Festival (S. Korea)	(Lee <i>et al.</i> , 2012)
	Colourful Multicultural Festival (S. Korea)	(Lee <i>et al.</i> , 2012)
<b>Film</b>	Global Film Tourism	(Connell, 2012)
<b>Fire</b>	Fire Festival of the Fallas	(Costa, 2002)
	Maleny Fire Event	(Lewis and Dowsey-Magog, 1993)
<b>Folk</b>	Edmonton Folk Festival	(Gordon and Erkut, 2004)
<b>Food</b>	South Beach Wine and Food Festival (USA)	(Park <i>et al.</i> , 2008)
<b>Arts</b>	Edinburgh International Festival	(Gratton <i>et al.</i> , 1995)
	Aardklop National Arts Festival	(Cina and Botha, 2003)
<b>Seasonal</b>	Spring Break (USA)	(Josiam <i>et al.</i> , 1998)
	Creole Christmas Festival	(Chacko and Schaffer, 1993)

## Appendix 2: Interviewee Details

Given Name	Age	Location	Occupation	Before	Other Festivals	Camping	Attending With
John	22	France/Edinburgh	Student	n	y	y	Friends
Steven	46	Motherwell	Engineer	y, 14	y	y	Friends, son*
Patrick	18	Motherwell	Student	y,1	n	y	Friends, dad*
Emma	22	-	Design Intern	n	Other	y	Friends
Laura	24	Newcastle	Student	n	y	y	Friends
Jane	24	Newcastle	Financial Accountant	n	y	y	Friends
Garth	37	Close	Investment Analyst	y, 6	n	y, residence	Wife
Esther	19	Edinburgh	Student	n	n	y	Friends, school and university
Emily	19	Edinburgh	Student	n	n	y	Friends, school and university
Phil	28	Edinburgh	Investment Management	y, 10	y	y	Friends
Greg	28	Edinburgh	Financial Analyst	y,8	n	y	Friends
Claire	21	Edinburgh	Student	y,1	n	y	Friends
Lucy	24	-	Trainee Accountant	y,2	y	y	Boyfriend
Caroline	20	Australia	Student	n	y	y	Friends
Justin	20	Leeds	Student	y, 8	n	y	Brother, girlfriend
George	21	Dunfermline	Retail Manager	y,10	y	y	Friends
Robert	19	Glasgow	Chef	y,1	n	y	Colleagues, friends
Tim	21	Dunfermline	Student	n	y	y	Friends
Randy	22	Dunfermline	Teacher	n	y	y	Friends
Richard	55	Greenock	School Teacher	n	y	y	Friends
Maureen	50-60	Newcastle	Market Researcher	y, 1	n	y, quiet	Family*
Hayley	50-60	Newcastle	Retired	y, 1	n	y, quiet	Family*
Jane	30	Glasgow	Journalist	y,4	y	y	Friends
Mary	36	Musselburgh	Software Engineer	y,4	y	y	Friends
Colin	35	Musselburgh	Post-doc Researcher	y,4	y	y	Friends
Hannah	19	Local	Unemployed	y,4	n	y	Friends
Dawn	20	Local	Student	y,2	n	y	Friends
Alwyn	22	Glasgow	Student	n	y	y	Hen Party
Mandy	23	Glasgow	Graduate	n	y	y	Hen Party
Alesha	29	Glasgow	Solicitor	n	y	y	Hen Party
Michael	40	Glasgow	Performer	y,4	y	y, artists area	Friends, band

David	25	Glasgow	Performer	y,4	y	y, artists area	Friends, band
Angela	24	Local	Child Care	y,2	n	y	Friends
Dean	21	Local	Electrician	y,2	n	y	Friends
Stephanie	20	Local	Student Nurse	n	n	y	Friends
Anne	20	Inverness	Student	y,2	n	y	Friends, father*
Harold	48	Inverness	Technical Support	y,5	y	y, quiet	Friends, daughter*
Jill	19	Dingwall	Student	y,1	y	y	Friends
Hilary	20	Dingwall/Edinburgh	Student	y,2	y	y	Friends
Ben	20	Dingwall/Edinburgh	Student	y,1	y	y	Friends
Sam	59	Retired	Aberlour	y,3	n	n	Wife
Gavin	47	Local	Builder	y,1	n	n	Family
Andrea	45	Local	-	y,1	n	n	Family
James	65	England	Retired	n	y	y, caravan	Wife
Gail	65	England	Retired	n	y	y, caravan	Husband
Gordon	39	Inverness	Engineering Consultant	n	y	y	Family
Phil	36	Newton	Consultant	n	y	n	Family
Rita	33	Newton	F/T Mother	n	y	n	Family
Charles	3	Newton	-	n	n	n	Family
Mitch	19	Muir of Ord	Student	y,1	y	y	Friends
Jeremiah	19	Muir of Ord	Student	y,1	y	y	Friends
Carl	23	Glasgow	Mechanic	y,2	y	y	Girlfriend

### Appendix 3: Coding Schedule

<b>Stimuli</b>	<b>Response</b>
Activities	Planning, Taking part, Inclusion
Expectations	Pre-festival excitement, Negative expectations, Sources of information
Experiences	New experiences, Other festivals, False experiences, Unique experiences
Festival	Culture, Lifestyle, Local festivals, Definition
Individual Occurrences	Authenticity, Escape, Exploration, Own festival, Unique identity, Tradition, Memories, Rite of passage, Novelty
Information	Hearsay, Word of mouth, Reputation
Involvement	Community, Locality, Performing, Taking part, Inclusivity
Non-musical Stimuli	Campsite activities, non-musical activities
Uncontrollable Stimuli	Media, Other festivals, Weather, Luxury, Mainstream, Sustainable, Value (money)
Reaction to Stimuli	Atmosphere, Organisational changes, Festival definition, Commercialisation, Holiday alternative,